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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 011864

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VALENCIA REPORTS ON ELN-GOC
COMMUNICATIONS

REF: BOGOTA 09991

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) Ambassador Valencia, the Mexican facilitator for talks between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the GOC, briefed the Ambassador on recent communications between the two sides on November 16. On October 8, the ELN offered to meet with the GOC in Mexico but demanded the GOC provide a helicopter and aircraft for the visit, prevent INTERPOL from taking action against them, and release imprisoned commander "Francisco Galan" (Gerardo Bermudez) for the talks. The GOC responded by repeating its condition for a unilateral cease-fire before any meeting, but with the condition that it could be a temporary cease-fire. It also asked the ELN to clarify whether it was asking for a humanitarian accord to be followed by a cease-fire, and whether it would be willing to meet with the GOC in the Mexican Embassy in Bogota after declaring a temporary cease-fire. Valencia said the ELN would respond negatively and expressed frustration that the talks could be reaching a breaking point. As Valencia's principle interlocutor was the imprisoned Galan, the Ambassador encouraged Valencia to try to gain wider access to the ELN leadership. He said the U.S. was willing to support a legitimate peace process, would not press the GOC to jeopardize the process with the paramilitaries and eventually the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) by making too many concessions to the ELN, and urged Valencia to publicly blame the ELN if talks were to break down. End Summary.

ELN Makes Demands

[¶](#)2. (C) On November 16, Mexico's Ambassador Valencia, who facilitates talks between the ELN and the GOC, briefed the Ambassador on recent communications between the two sides. On October 8, the ELN Central Command (COCE) proposed a meeting with the GOC in Mexico but demanded that the GOC provide a helicopter and aircraft for the visit, prevent INTERPOL from taking any action against them, and release imprisoned ELN commander "Francisco Galan." Valencia explained that the COCE had been upset by government comments following the leaked conversations between Peace Commissioner Restrepo and the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) (reftel). The COCE continues to resist being labeled and treated as a terrorist group rather than a "legitimate" rebel group, being equated to the AUC, and being subjected to jail sentences for major crimes.

The GOC Response

[¶](#)3. (C) Last week, the GOC responded to the ELN, reiterating its condition of a unilateral cease-fire before any meeting. If the ELN agreed, the GOC would be willing to hold talks and consider the ELN's political demands. The GOC also requested two clarifications: (1) Is the ELN asking for a sequence in which a humanitarian accord would be followed by a cease-fire? and (2) Would the ELN be willing to meet with the GOC and Valencia in the Mexican Embassy in Bogota following a declaration of a temporary cease-fire?

Prospects Dim

[¶](#)4. (C) The ELN has not issued a response yet but Valencia understands that the ELN will not accept even a temporary cease-fire because it fears setting a precedent of requiring a cease-fire before any meeting. Valencia expressed frustration at the impasse and predicted that the talks could be near a breaking point. Valencia's abilities are further limited because the imprisoned Galan may not accurately represent the COCE's mindset. Without a peace deal, Galan remains in jail, making him a willing interlocutor but not necessarily a good COCE spokesman. Valencia admitted that he did not know the views of the COCE members.

15. (C) The Ambassador encouraged Valencia to try other channels to access the COCE. Author Gabriel Garcia Marquez has been involved in outreach to the ELN and could have better access. The Embassy will not pressure the GOC to soften its conditions any more than it already has, especially regarding the conditions of a cease-fire, jail time, and other elements of importance to the paramilitary (and eventual FARC) processes, but was prepared to help a legitimate peace process in other ways, including the use of the residence for a meeting between the COCE and GOC. (Note: The Ambassador did not/not offer his participation in any way in the talks themselves.) The Ambassador noted that if communications were to break down completely, Valencia should publicly blame the ELN's intransigence.

16. (C) Comment: The GOC has been flexible and committed to starting a peace process with the ELN without standing down on the requisite cease-fire. The ELN, meanwhile, does not appear to know what it wants out of talks or if it is even serious about negotiating. End comment.

WOOD